

Frequently Asked Questions about 2010 Bridge Toll Increase

Q.: What is BATA?

A.: The Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) was created by the California Legislature to administer the base toll revenues generated by the Bay Area's seven state-owned toll bridges. In January 1998, MTC — the transportation planning, financing and coordinating agency for the nine-county region — began operations as BATA. For more information about BATA, go to <www.mtc.ca.gov/bata>. The state Legislature in 2005 authorized BATA to administer all toll revenue from the seven state-owned bridges and established the Toll Bridge Program Oversight Committee, which includes the BATA executive director, as well as director of Caltrans and the executive director of the California Transportation Commission.

Q.: What is Caltrans' role in toll bridge operations?

A: Caltrans owns and operates the California state highway system, including all seven of the Bay Area's state-owned toll bridges (*the Antioch, Benicia-Martinez, Carquinez, Dumbarton, Richmond-San Rafael, San Mateo-Hayward and San Francisco-Oakland Bay bridges*).

Q.: Why are tolls being raised on the seven state-owned bridges?

A: The single biggest reason is to help finance the projected \$750 million cost of urgently needed seismic retrofits of the Antioch and Dumbarton bridges. Increased toll revenue also will help BATA address an estimated \$35 million a year increase in its borrowing costs due to fundamental changes in the municipal bond market, and to help offset a slow but steady five-year decline in toll-paying traffic across the bridges.

Q.: How is my current \$4 toll spent?

A.: The first dollar is used to pay for maintenance and operation of the seven state-owned bridges, and to finance the Regional Measure 1 projects approved by Bay Area voters in 1988. The third dollar is used to finance the Regional Traffic Relief Plan approved by voters in 2004 through Regional Measure 2. The second and fourth dollars were added by the state Legislature (originally in 1991 and again in 2005) to help finance the seismic retrofit of the five other state-owned toll bridges in the Bay Area.

Q.: Why were the Antioch and Dumbarton bridges not included in the original state Toll Bridge Seismic Retrofit Program?

A: Because the Antioch Bridge (built in 1978) and the Dumbarton Bridge (1982) met seismic standards established after the 1971 Sylmar earthquake in Southern California, and were relatively new when the state Toll Bridge Seismic Retrofit Program was established, neither was included in the first round of seismic safety studies. However, due to findings from subsequent quakes — including Loma Prieta in 1989, Northridge in 1994 and Kobe (Japan) in 1995 — seismic standards now are much higher. A two-year evaluation conducted by BATA and Caltrans shows both bridges need significant strengthening to protect public safety.

Q.: How much will the retrofit of the Antioch and Dumbarton bridges cost?

A: The cost of retrofitting both bridges is estimated at \$750 million. This includes \$483 million for the Dumbarton Bridge and \$267 million for the Antioch Bridge. About one-third of the total cost estimate is to fund a contingency account so that unexpected construction problems that may arise during the four-year process will not affect the funding plans.

Q.: How much debt does BATA have, and why?

A: BATA's new financing model assumes the Authority will have some \$8.5 billion of bonds outstanding to finance roughly \$13 billion worth of projects, the largest of which is the estimated \$6.3 billion replacement of the Bay Bridge East Span. Proceeds from the sale of BATA bonds also have been used to finance many other projects, including the new Carquinez Bridge (completed 2003), the new Benicia-Martinez Bridge (completed 2007), widening of the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge (completed 2003), construction of the Richmond Parkway (completed 2001), reconstruction of the Interstate 880/State Route 92 interchange in Hayward (under construction) and the seismic retrofits (all completed) of the original 1962 Benicia-Martinez Bridge, the original 1958 Carquinez Bridge, the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge, the Bay Bridge West Span and the West Approach to the Bay Bridge in San Francisco.

Q.: How has upheaval in the financial markets affected BATA?

A: Though the credit crisis has eased in recent months, the market upheaval of 2007-09 has cost BATA and Bay Area toll payers millions of dollars in additional financing expenses. While BATA previously was able to sell variable-rate bonds and to employ swaps and other techniques that trimmed the Authority's average interest costs as low as 3.5 percent, BATA's new financing model assumes much heavier reliance on long-term, fixed-rate debt with rates of 6.25 percent or higher. These higher rates are expected to raise borrowing costs by as much as \$35 million each year.

Q.: How big is the drop in traffic on the state-owned toll bridges?

A: The number of toll-paying vehicles crossing the Bay Area's seven state-owned toll bridges has fallen about 10 percent over the last five years—from a peak of more than 126 million in fiscal 2003-04 to about 113 million in 2008-09.

Q.: Is the drop in traffic unique to the Bay Area?

A: No. Other toll agencies around the country report similar patterns. These include New York MTA Bridges and Tunnels, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and Southern California's Transportation Corridor Agencies.

Q.: Has There Been a Corresponding Increase in Carpooling?

A: Yes. As the number of toll-paid transactions on Bay Area bridges shrinks, the number of toll-free crossings by carpools continues to rise. Indeed, carpool crossings bottomed out at just over 9.1 million during fiscal 2003-04 (the same year toll-paid traffic peaked), and have since increased every year to a total of more than 10 million in 2008-09. Carpools now account for 46 percent of all traffic across the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge during the peak morning hour of 7 a.m. to 8 a.m.

Q.: Do Other Regions Offer Free Tolls for Carpools?

A: No. While discounted tolls for carpoolers are quite common around the country, BATA and the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway & Transportation District appear to be the only major toll agencies offering free passage for carpools. This tradition began back in the 1970s, when auto tolls on the Bay Area's state-owned toll bridges ranged from just 40 cents at the Carquinez and Benicia-Martinez bridges to 50 cents at the Antioch Bridge; 75 cents at the Dumbarton, San Mateo-Hayward and Bay bridges; and \$1 at the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Q.: How do BATA tolls for trucks and other multi-axle vehicles compare to other bridges?

A. Because BATA's most recent toll hikes have been \$1-across-the-board increases, tolls for standard two-axle cars have risen at a much steeper rate than those for multi-axle vehicles. Indeed, while auto tolls have increased by 300 percent (to \$4 from \$1) since 1992, tolls for three-axle trucks have doubled (to \$6 from \$3), and tolls for a typical five-axle truck/trailer combination have increased by just 36 percent, to \$11.25 from \$8.25. This compares to \$18 at the Golden Gate Bridge, \$19 on the State Route 73 Toll Road in Orange County, \$48 at the bridges and tunnels operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and \$72 at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge connecting the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Staten Island. Under the new BATA toll schedule, the toll for a typical five-axle truck/trailer combination will climb to \$18 in July 2011 and to \$25 in July 2012.

Q.: Why is the toll increase for big trucks delayed for a year?

A. To allow trucking companies sufficient time to complete most of their existing contracts with shippers under the current toll schedule, and to incorporate the new tolls into their next round of contracts. These contracts typically have a term of 24 to 36 months.